



Sustainable development in Wallonia: trial and error along two tracks of governance

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Executive Summary (in Dutch)

Deze paper stelt de tussentijdse resultaten voor van het onderzoek naar de case Wallonië van project 3 van het Steunpunt. Het onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat duurzame ontwikkeling zich in Wallonië via twee beleidssporen ontwikkeld heeft. Enerzijds zijn er meerdere pogingen geweest om, in navolging van bijvoorbeeld de federale overheid of van Vlaanderen, een strategie of plan duurzame ontwikkeling op te stellen. Anderzijds duikt het debat rond duurzame ontwikkeling regelmatig op in het kader van de transversale strategieën voor de economische heropleving van Wallonië. Beide sporen hebben tot nu toe relatief weinig succes gehad, maar recent worden er positieve signalen gegeven. Het moet daarbij opgemerkt worden dat de paper de historische ontwikkelingen schetst tot juni 2010.

De start van het eerste spoor is te situeren in het midden van de jaren '90. In navolging van de Conferentie van Rio werd het Waalse milieubeleid georiënteerd in het licht van duurzame ontwikkeling. Wallonië kan daarin zelfs als een voorloper in Europa beschouwd worden. De pijlpalen van de nieuwe oriëntatie zijn het *Décret relatif à la planification en matière d'environnement dans le cadre du développement durable* van 1994 en het daaropvolgende *Plan d'environnement pour le développement durable* van 1995. Dat laatste was inhoudelijk echter een milieubeleidsplan, en kan geen plan duurzame ontwikkeling genoemd worden. De stappen die in de jaren '90 werden gezet, hebben duurzame ontwikkeling op de kaart gezet in Wallonië, maar er een louter ecologische interpretatie aan gekoppeld.

In 1999 kreeg duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid een nieuwe impuls in Wallonië, door de vorming van de eerste paarsgroene regering. Het coalitieakkoord kondigde de ontwikkeling aan van een plan duurzame ontwikkeling, maar dat plan is er nooit gekomen. Het was een eis van Écolo, maar in tegenstelling tot het federale en Vlaamse niveau waren de groenen in Wallonië in 1999 numeriek niet van belang in de coalitie, en hadden ze niet de nodige *bargaining power* om hun eis door te drukken.

De volgende poging tot institutionalisering van duurzame ontwikkeling werd genomen in 2005 door de nieuwe regering van PS en cdH, als rechtstreeks gevolg van de onderhandelingen voor een nationale strategie duurzame ontwikkeling die opgestart werden door federaal Staatssecretaris Van Weert. In tegenstelling tot Vlaanderen, dat voornamelijk mondiale en Europese engagementen inroept, verwijst Wallonië stevast naar die nationale onderhandelingen als motivatie om een eigen strategie duurzame ontwikkeling op te stellen. Het mandaat om dat te doen werd toevertrouwd aan Minister van Leefmilieu Lutgen. De ontwikkeling van een *Stratégie Wallonne de Développement Durable* (WSDO), die werd toevertrouwd aan enkele consultatiebureaus, moest in twee etappes gebeuren. In een eerste fase werd een inventarisatie opgemaakt van bestaande Waalse beleidsplannen en strategieën, en werden de thema's van de tweede EU Strategie Duurzame Ontwikkeling vertaald naar een Waalse context. De tweede fase moest de vorm krijgen van een concreet actieplan met strategische middellangetermijndoelstellingen en concrete kortetermijndoelstellingen. Die tweede fase is echter, in tegenstelling tot het eerste document, nooit goedgekeurd door de Waalse regering. Het WSDO-project kampte met verschillende problemen. Zo was er weinig medewerking van de administraties en kabinetten buiten het milieudomein, heeft er nooit een politiek debat plaatsgevonden en was het steeds onduidelijk wat het statuut en het gewicht van de WSDO zou zijn. Bovendien werd de tweede fase slechts enkele maanden voor de verkiezingen van 2009 afgerond, wat een politieke consensus onmogelijk maakte.

Het tweede spoor dat in de paper beschreven wordt, heeft betrekking op de grote transversale strategieën voor economisch herstel. De economische heropleving van Wallonië is de topprioriteit van elke Waalse regering sinds de federalisering van België. Het laatste

decennium werd er ingezet op grootschalige toekomstplannen die de economie moesten aanwakkeren. Het startschot werd gegeven door het *Contrat d'avenir pour la Wallonie* van de paarsgroene regering in 2000. Onder aandringen van Écolo gaf het plan ook aandacht aan duurzame ontwikkeling, wat weerspiegeld werd in de ondertitel '*Une Wallonie active et solidaire sur la voie du développement durable*'. Hoewel het plan verschillende acties bevat, was het vooral gefocust op tewerkstelling en ondernemerschap. Maar omwille van de ondertitel beschouwden PS en MR het Toekomstcontract als Wallonië's strategie duurzame ontwikkeling, en gebruikten ze het als een excuus om de gemaakte belofte van het coalitieakkoord (zie hoger) geen gevolg te geven.

Omdat de impact van het Toekomstcontract teleurstellend was, lanceerde PS-voorzitter Di Rupo in 2005 het idee voor een 'Marshallplan' voor Wallonië. In dat plan, dat € 1 miljard inzette op economische maatregelen, werd duurzame ontwikkeling niet vermeld. Er werd ook nooit een link gelegd tussen het Marshallplan en het WSDO-project, dat op hetzelfde moment in de steigers stond.

In 2009 ontstond er een nieuw klimaat voor duurzame ontwikkeling na de ongeëvenaarde overwinning van Écolo bij de Waalse verkiezingen. In het coalitieakkoord van PS, Écolo en cdH is duurzame ontwikkeling alomtegenwoordig. De verantwoordelijkheid voor duurzame ontwikkeling wordt losgekoppeld van Leefmilieu en toevertrouwd aan vice-minister-president Nollet. Bovendien is duurzame ontwikkeling een van de transversale doelstellingen van de opvolger van het Marshallplan, het *Plan Marshall 2.vert*. Het plan zet ondermeer in op tewerkstelling in de milieusector, op energiemaatregelen en op milieutechnologie. Bovendien voorziet het € 5,25 miljoen om duurzame ontwikkeling te integreren in het Waalse beleid, bijvoorbeeld door het oprichten van een adviescel voor duurzame ontwikkeling. De meeste van die maatregelen moeten heden nog geïmplementeerd worden.

De laatste ontwikkelingen van het tweede spoor tonen aan dat de interpretatie van duurzame ontwikkeling in Wallonië geëvolueerd is van een ecologisch naar een eerder holistisch model. Een recente beleidsbeslissing doet bovendien vermoeden dat in het kader van het *Plan Marshall 2.vert* de Waalse overheid nu denkt aan het ontwikkelen van een administratieve structuur en bijhorend plan voor duurzame ontwikkeling. De twee sporen die in deze paper worden beschreven, zouden op die manier worden samengevoegd.

Tot slot blijft de paper stilstaan bij enkele factoren die het traject van het Waalse duurzame-ontwikkelingsbeleid langs de twee sporen richting hebben gegeven. Het valt op dat de internationale invloed, die doorslaggevend bleek in de Vlaamse case¹ als veel minder dwingend wordt ervaren in Wallonië. De impact van nationale onderhandelingen was relevanter, al konden ook die de ontwikkeling van een strategie duurzame ontwikkeling niet garanderen. Socio-economische factoren bleken wel doorslaggevend. De economische situatie van Wallonië domineert grotendeels de debatten en verhindert dat er politiek kapitaal geïnvesteerd wordt in een aparte strategie duurzame ontwikkeling. Hoe duurzame ontwikkeling verder evolueert op de Waalse agenda zal dan ook afhangen van de economische toestand. Een laatste factor is de politieke context. Meer dan in sommige andere cases blijkt in Wallonië de politieke wil van één specifieke actor, de groene partij, uiterst belangrijk. De analyse toont echter aan dat die actor, naast politieke wil, ook een voldoende dosis *bargaining power* nodig heeft om duurzame ontwikkeling op een betekenisvolle manier op de kaart te zetten.

1 De internationale invloed op het duurzameontwikkelingsbeleid van Vlaanderen wordt beschreven door Happaerts en Van den Brande (2010).

1. Introduction

In this paper the focus is on the sustainable development policy of Wallonia. One of the three Belgian Regions (*gewesten*),² Wallonia has competences in many important areas such as environment, spatial planning, agriculture, economic development, foreign trade, energy policy, transport and infrastructure (Hooghe et al., 2008a, p. 185-186; Swenden et al., 2006, p. 865-868). The allocation of competences in Belgium is based on the principle of exclusivity. That means that each matter can only pertain to one level of government, i.e. that level has both legislating and implementing responsibilities in that matter (Reuchamps and Onclin, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, no hierarchy exists between federal and subnational legislation (Swenden, 2006, p. 54), which makes that Wallonia and the other Belgian entities³ are to be considered as one of the most autonomous subnational governments worldwide. Since the competences of the federal level are extremely limited in some areas, the involvement of the subnational governments is indispensable for the implementation of international commitments on sustainable development. In Belgium, all governments (both federal and subnational) need to pursue sustainable development within the limits of their competences. That was agreed by an intergovernmental commission in 2005 and it has been enshrined in the Belgian Constitution since 2007 (Belgische Senaat, 2007, art. 7bis; IMCDO 2005, §5). The federal government was said to be a frontrunner with regard to sustainable development, due to the early adoption of a federal act in 1997 (Rombouts, 2003, p. 36). The subnational governments have only recently taken initiatives on sustainable development. Flanders, for instance, has started to institutionalize sustainable development in 2004 (Happaerts and Van den Brande, 2010, p. 20-21).

In Wallonia, governance for sustainable development has followed two main tracks. On the one hand, initiatives have been taken to issue a Walloon sustainable development plan or strategy, after the federal and Flemish examples. Yet those initiatives have failed to produce a comprehensive strategy to this date. The next section disentangles the process leading up to the failure of that first track, and identifies the factors explaining it. On the other hand, different attempts have been made to integrate sustainable development into the main economic strategies initiated by the Walloon government. The third section maps out how that second track has evolved in the past decade. Subsequently, the opportunities of both tracks are discussed in the light of recent policy choices. In a final section, the different factors explaining the Walloon sustainable development policy are highlighted. Four factors have been withheld from the outset: international influences (processes of transnational communication), degree of autonomy, political context and socio-economic conditions.⁴ It is assessed which of those factors account for how governance for sustainable development has been pursued by the Walloon government, through both tracks.

This paper is the first comprehensive attempt to document and analyze governance for sustainable development in Wallonia. The conclusions are drawn from a detailed process-tracing, based on literature study, an analysis of parliamentary and policy documents, and a

2 Belgium is a young federal state with three Regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels) and three Communities (Flemish, French, German-speaking). Only the policies of the Region of Wallonia are considered here, not those of the French Community.

3 The high degree of autonomy of Wallonia is reflected in its score of 13 (out of a maximum of 15) on self-rule in the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al., 2008b).

4 These factors have been identified in the context of the author's PhD project. More information can be obtained from the author.

series of interviews with government officials and other stakeholders at both the Walloon and the Belgian federal level. A list of the interviewees can be found at the end of the paper. The empirical research was conducted between June 2008 and June 2010, so subsequent developments are not taken into account.

2. The non-development of a sustainable development strategy

2.1 Sustainable development in Wallonia: history of the concept

In Wallonia, the concept of sustainable development was introduced in the context of environmental policy in the mid-90s. In the aftermath of the Rio Summit, Wallonia tried to reorient its environmental policy in the direction of sustainable development. That reorientation is enshrined in the 1994 Act on Environmental Planning in the Framework of Sustainable Development (*Décret relatif à la planification en matière d'environnement dans le cadre du développement durable*). It vaguely states that sustainable development needs to be taken into account at the level of the Walloon government, but does not provide concrete instruments to do so. The act transformed the former Walloon Environment Council (CWE, *Conseil wallon de l'environnement*), a multistakeholder advisory council on environmental issues, into a Walloon Environment Council for Sustainable Development (CWEDD, *Conseil wallon de l'environnement pour le développement durable*). It also called for the Environment Plan for Sustainable Development (PEDD, *Plan d'environnement pour le développement durable*), which was published in 1995. The plan contains an important conceptual discussion on sustainable development and makes clear linkages with international commitments, which is why Wallonia could be considered a frontrunner in that regard (Zaccaï and Bauler, 2005, p. 159). However, the themes that the plan treats and the actions that it proposes do not transcend the environmental realm, so it cannot be considered as a real sustainable development plan. Likewise, the CWEDD remains an advisory council with a mainly environmental mandate (see also Thunis, 2000, p. 10). The 1994 act thus introduces a minor shift only. Sustainable development was introduced in the discourse, but did not succeed in shaking off its environmental chains.

A new impulse for sustainable development came after the 1999 elections. Those elections, held for the European, federal and subnational parliaments, were a breakthrough for the Walloon Green party (*Écolo*), who formed a coalition with Socialists (*PS*) and Liberals (*PRL*, later merged into *MR*) at both the federal and the Walloon level. For the first time, sustainable development was mentioned in the government's declaration to the Walloon parliament, which lays out the main policy intentions for the coming term. The declaration states that in an era of post-industrialization, Wallonia must "build a model of sustainable development for the next century" (Parlement wallon, 1999, p. 4, personal translation) and that the Walloon government will issue a sustainable development plan "in the spirit of the Rio Conference" (Parlement wallon, 1999, p. 6, 27, personal translation). Those inclusions were made at the demand of the Greens. However, no concrete tools for sustainable development were provided, and the promises remained dead letter. A reason might be that at the Walloon level, the Green party was numerically unnecessary to form a majority, in contrast to the federal level. The Greens were rather included in order to rule with the same majority as at the federal level (Deschouwer, 2000, p. 129). Although they succeeded in introducing sustainable development in the coalition agreement in Wallonia, they failed to force their coalition partners to live up to their promise. No concrete initiatives for sustainable development policy were taken during the 1999-2004 term. That is surprising, since during that period sustainable development appeared high on the international agenda, with the publication of the first EU Sustainable Development

Strategy (EUSDS) in 2001 and the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. Whereas in Flanders those international developments triggered the institutionalization of sustainable development (Happaerts and Van den Brande, 2010, p. 20-21), no such influence is noticeable in Wallonia. Although Environment Minister Michel Foret (of the Liberals) was present in Johannesburg and signed the Gauteng Declaration,⁵ back at home no initiatives were taken. In the Walloon parliament a few debates, initiated by Green representatives, discussed the desirability of a sustainable development plan, but the idea to issue such a plan was rejected by the other coalition partners. The Socialists and Liberals rather thought that with the Future Contract, the government's transversal economic strategy, they already had a sustainable development plan in place (cf *infra*).

In short, although Wallonia conceptually reoriented its environmental policy towards the goals of sustainable development in the mid-90s, and despite some attempts by the Greens in the 1999-2004 coalition, Wallonia did not take a significant step towards the institutionalization of sustainable development. The next section discusses developments after 2004, including a new momentum that was created as a consequence of national developments.

2.2 A Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy: finally?

After the 2004 elections, the Green party—back in the opposition—proposed a law to issue a sustainable development strategy. According to that proposition, the strategy would be a consequence of a revision of the 1994 Act on Environmental Planning in the Framework of Sustainable Development. The aim of the revision was to end the confusing environmental interpretation that was given to sustainable development in the 90s. The planning cycle on sustainable development that would be installed by the proposition would highly resemble the model put in place at the federal level in 1997. Yet the proposition was never put on the agenda by the Walloon parliament.

Action by the Walloon government was rather triggered by a national initiative. In 2004, the federal Minister for Sustainable Development wanted to negotiate on a national sustainable development strategy, as a response to international commitments. In Belgium, although the federal government has issued several sustainable development plans, there has never been a truly *national* strategy (encompassing all governments). The negotiations for the strategy took place within an interministerial committee with representatives from the federal and from all subnational governments. It was a very difficult exercise because of the complex division of competences in Belgium and because of the reluctance of some of the subnational governments to move forward (Happaerts, 2010, p. 20). The negotiations resulted in nothing more than a short framework text (IMCDO 2005) and have never been restarted afterwards. Although the framework text does not call for concrete actions to be taken by the subnational governments, it did inspire Wallonia to take action. Interviews clearly show that Walloon policy-makers and administrative officials interpret the negotiations on the national strategy as a formal request to develop a real Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy (WSDS). In 2004

5 The Gauteng Declaration is the outcome document of a side-event at the Johannesburg Summit. The event was initiated by some subnational governments, who felt that they had been ignored in the global debate on sustainable development. Signed by 23 subnational governments and 4 transnational associations, the Gauteng Declaration calls for the issuance of subnational sustainable development strategies (Happaerts et al., 2010a, p. 130-131). The Gauteng Declaration led to the subsequent creation of the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (nrg4SD), of which Wallonia has been a member ever since (Happaerts et al., 2010b).

a new coalition of Socialists and Christian Democrats (*cdH*) was formed in Wallonia. During the negotiations on the national strategy, the Walloon government decided that the responsibility for sustainable development rested with Environment Minister Benoît Lutgen (of the Christian Democrats) and requested that he would develop a WSDS. In 2006, the Minister contracted a consultancy firm to draft the WSDS.⁶ Yet it soon became clear that the anticipated time and means were grossly insufficient to produce a comprehensive strategy with objectives and actions, even more so because the process intended to comprise several consultation rounds with representatives from the Walloon administration and different stakeholders. Interviews pointed out, for instance, that many difficulties were experienced when the team encroached on domains where other (sectoral) strategies were already operational. Because of those constraints, the Minister decided that the contract would be limited to drafting a first phase of the WSDS, consisting of an inventory of existing plans and the development of general sustainable development goals for Wallonia. After a year, the firm produced a text containing an exhaustive introduction on sustainable development, the identification of seven themes, four governance principles and three transversal tools. The text also includes a list of existing plans operating in the domains touched upon by the WSDS. The seven themes were copied from the second EUSDS and translated into a Walloon policy context.⁷ Within each theme, some general challenges for Wallonia are formulated. As has been observed in previous research (Happaerts, 2010, p. 19-20; Happaerts and Van den Brande, 2010, p. 23), references to European commitments are commonplace in Belgian politics, because it is easier to agree on external constraints than to rely on internal negotiations. The governance principles and transversal tools also largely emanate from international policy-making.⁸ The first phase of the WSDS was approved by the Walloon government in the summer of 2007 without any political debate. It was also agreed that a second phase would equip the WSDS with a real action plan. However, seven months passed before a new initiative was taken and before another team was contracted to draft the second phase.⁹ When the team started, the 2009 subnational elections were only a year away. The action plan that was produced contains strategic mid term goals and concrete short term actions for each of the seven themes. Yet by the time it was finalized, all ministers were already in a campaigning mood. Since the second phase of the WSDS contained real actions and concrete commitments, it could not be as easily adopted as the first phase. Because a political discussion was

6 The government solicited a proposal from five consultancy firms and eventually selected CAP Conseil, a small Walloon firm specializing in sustainable development and corporate social responsibility.

7 The themes are climate change and clean energy; sustainable transport; sustainable consumption and production; conservation and management of natural resources; public health; social inclusion, demography and migration; and global poverty and sustainable development challenges.

8 The governance principles are participation, inter and intragenerational solidarity, integration and transversal decision-making (with a reference to subsidiarity), and evaluation (also comprising good governance and the precautionary principle). They clearly reflect some of the most relevant principles of the Rio Declaration. The three transversal tools are research and innovation; education, training and sensitization, and spatial planning. The first two are copied from the EUSDS, the third is rather included because in Belgium spatial planning is a subnational competence and especially relevant for the sustainable development activities of the subnational governments.

9 After a call for tenders, the contract was assigned to a joint team of EcoRes, a sustainable development consultancy, and Institut Destrée, a Walloon research centre.

impossible due to the upcoming elections, the government failed to adopt the second phase of the WSDS.

The WSDS project took some laudable steps in the process of the institutionalization of sustainable development in Wallonia. The texts disclose the outcome of a reflection of the challenges Wallonia faces, and it could be used in later initiatives. They offer, for instance, a good indication of the linkages sustainable development has with sectoral policy areas and with international commitments. Also, the idea of working in two phases, with a general guiding document and a more concrete action plan, can be interesting. However, the proposed WSDS has some severe shortcomings. The action that it calls for is completely grounded on existing structures and instruments. It gives the impression that sustainable development can be achieved without the creation of new instruments or the investment of specific means, which is refuted in the literature (Bruyninckx, 2006, p. 268; Jänicke and Jörgens, 1998, p. 30; Meadowcroft, 2008, p. 110). Many observers have uttered heavy critique on the process of the development of the strategy. It is striking, for instance, that the Environment department was the only administration actively involved in the process. The other administrations and the cabinets of the other ministers did not cooperate, although the Environment Minister invited them to do so. It appears that there was no understanding that sustainable development could transcend the realm of environmental policy, or no political will to permit it to do so. Moreover, no political debates took place on the formulation or adoption of the WSDS. While some of those difficulties can be attributed to the poor timing of the process, they are certainly a symptom of the low political weight attached to the WSDS. It is also revealing that the proposed WSDS never received any public attention. In addition, it has always been unclear what the position of the WSDS would have been vis-à-vis other plans or policies.

2.3 Reasons of the failure

Wallonia's failure to produce a sustainable development strategy is the result of an interplay of different factors. First of all, it appears that the international legitimacy pressures to adopt a real strategy have never been compelling enough for the Walloon government. Although international influences are noticeable (e.g. Rio was at the origin of the 1994 act, the EUSDS shaped the WSDS), the character of the international commitments seems too 'soft' to assure the issuance of a sustainable development strategy. That stands in contrast with, for instance, Flanders, where international developments were the direct trigger for the Flemish sustainable development strategy.¹⁰ Action in Wallonia was rather dictated by developments at the national level. The negotiations on a national sustainable development strategy triggered the development of a WSDS. However, socioeconomic and political factors have inhibited the Walloon government to eventually adopt the strategy. Because Wallonia historically has an economic disadvantage compared to Belgian and European averages (cf *infra*), the number one priority of all Walloon governments since the instauration of federalism has been economic revival. It is hypothesized that as a consequence thereof, no political capital could be invested in another major project such as a comprehensive sustainable development strategy. Only the Greens have taken recurrent steps to do so, but they have failed up to now. The plans for economic recovery, moreover, are typically centred on a short term vision, which hinders the

10 The fact that Wallonia has a weaker international 'identity' seems to play a role here. For instance, previous research has shown that in cases of subnational governments with a strong identity, such as Flanders or Quebec, international developments on sustainable development crystallize much more easily into concrete initiatives (Happaerts and Van den Brande, 2010).

long term thinking that is needed for sustainable development. Since no political capital has been invested in sustainable development, the responsibility for the issue was never assigned to anyone in the Walloon administration and no means have been invested in it. It was rather in the absence of a sound arrangement that the Environment administration felt it was responsible for it. The lack of an institutional anchor point has been an additional obstacle for initiatives such as the WSDS to gain ground.

3. Sustainable development in transversal strategies of economic development

Since sustainable development strategies are only one of the tools that can help implement sustainable development (Meadowcroft, 2007, p. 157), an assessment of sustainable development policy in Wallonia cannot be limited to a discussion on a possible WSDS. It is not because Wallonia up to now failed to develop such a strategy, that sustainable development has been completely absent from the political arena. At irregular intervals, the concept surfaces in other plans and strategies. The most significant among those are the consecutive transversal strategies of economic development that have been a priority of the Walloon governments since 1999. Those strategies have been trying to give Wallonia the new economic stimulus that it desperately needs. Indeed, while the southern Belgian entity was characterized by vast industrial prosperity during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, its economic situation has been deteriorating since the end of the Second World War (Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 8; Reid and Musyck, 2000, p. 183-184). Over the past decades its economic growth has been beneath European averages, and it has had a structurally higher unemployment rate than the other Belgian entities (Bayenet and Vandendorpe, 2006, p. 15). The main cause is the crisis of the Walloon coal sector and heavy industry, but other factors are invoked as well, such as a bad image with investors, the overdevelopment of the non-private sector and a lack of entrepreneurial spirit (Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 15-18; Mignolet, 2006, p. 95; Reid and Musyck, 2000, p. 187-188). Economic revival has been the top priority of Walloon governments since the creation of the Regions and the instauration of federalism in Belgium, and starting in 1999, consecutive strategies have aimed to give Wallonia a new economic impulse. At the same time, those strategies have tried to endow Wallonia with an overarching 'regional project', since the lack of an internally coherent 'Walloon identity'¹¹ can be invoked as a structural obstacle towards Wallonia's resurgence (Van Asbrouck, 2005, p. 52; Willame, 2006, p. 105-106).

3.1 Future Contract and Marshall Plan

The first transversal strategy of economic development in Wallonia was the Future Contract (*Contrat d'avenir pour la Wallonie*), launched by the government of Socialists, Liberals and Greens that was formed in 1999. Besides economic revival, the Future Contract wanted to initiate a new way of governing in Wallonia and to make a rupture with the past. The Contract's subtitle was "An active and solidary Wallonia on the path of sustainable development" (*Une Wallonie active et solidaire sur la voie du développement durable*) (Gouvernement wallon, 2000). It proposed many actions not only in the economic field, but also on social and environmental matters. Moreover, much emphasis was given to the principles of good governance and participation.

11 On the historical development, the political construction and the weakness of the Walloon identity, see Billiet et al. (2006) and Lecours (2001).

Observers have therefore stated that the Future Contract was an indication of Wallonia's willingness to move forward in the pursuit of sustainable development (e.g. Bachus et al., 2005, p. 199). The inclusion of sustainable development in the Future Contract was to a large extent due to the presence of the Greens in the coalition. Yet the Contract was still a mainly economic strategy with a dominant focus on jobs and entrepreneurship (see also Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 22). Nevertheless, the Socialist and Liberal coalition partners stated that with the Future Contract—and referring to its subtitle¹²—Wallonia already had a transversal strategy for sustainable development. A separate sustainable development plan or strategy was thus regarded as useless, and the Greens' attempts to take such an initiative were blocked. In any case, the Future Contract was criticized to propose too many disparate actions, without a clear vision or financial support behind it (see also Bayenet and Vandendorpe, 2006, p. 12). It appeared to be more of a communication tool than an action plan. Also after an actualization in 2002, with some new targets including on energy and transport, not much seemed to change in practice. The new coalition of Socialists and Christian Democrats tried to revive the Future Contract in 2005. They launched a renewed version with four strategic plans and clear targets, mainly aiming at job creation and at social inclusion (Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 23). But the enthusiasm for the Future Contract quickly faded away and the government realized that a new initiative was needed (Capron, 2005, p. 32).

It was the president of the Socialist party and former Walloon Minister-president Elio Di Rupo who launched the idea of a 'Marshall Plan' for Wallonia, in reference to the American aid program for Europe after the Second World War. The tenor of the initiative was unmistakable: things in Wallonia are bad and a major effort is needed to curve the trend. But besides the dire economic situation, the political instability in Belgium also played a role. The Walloon political parties anticipated that after the 2007 federal elections the Flemish parties would demand a new state reform with more economic powers and fiscal autonomy for the subnational entities, and they wanted to prepare Wallonia to stand on its own feet with regard to economic policy (Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 25-26; Lechat, 2005, p. 38-39). The Marshall Plan intended to spend € 1 billion on several actions within 5 priority axes, not transcending the economic realm. It also called for a complete mobilization of all economic actors in Wallonia (Accaputo et al., 2006). In contrast to the Future Contract, sustainable development was completely absent from the Marshall Plan, even in its discourse. Moreover, as indicated above, the process of drafting a WSDS was absolutely disconnected from the activities of the Marshall Plan.

In the same period, the Environment Minister took another initiative to integrate sustainable development in other policies. At the start of the coalition term, he contracted a consultancy firm to develop a sustainable development impact assessment tool.¹³ The tool consisted of a simple list of questions aimed at giving an indication whether a particular decision would have a positive or a negative impact with regard to sustainable development. After the tool had been developed, there was an intention to link it to the draft WSDS. Yet the Environment Minister never introduced the tool to the government or to the administration and it was never operationalized.

12 Interestingly, that interpretation is contradicted by the Future Contract itself, which repeats the promise made in the coalition agreement that a sustainable development plan will be issued (Gouvernement wallon, 2000, p. 22).

13 The firm was CAP Conseil, the same team that developed the first phase of the WSDS shortly afterwards.

In short, while sustainable development did manage to enter the discourse on the Future Contract between 1999 and 2004, it appears that the political climate after 2004 was not favourable for sustainable development to be integrated in other policies or strategies.

3.2 A new climate for sustainable development

A new climate for sustainable development emerged as a result of the 2009 subnational elections in Belgium. The elections were marked by the financial and economic crisis and by an ongoing political crisis in Belgium. They produced a remarkable result in Wallonia, with an unseen victory for the Greens—going from 8.5% to 18.5%—and negative scores for all other parties (Blaise et al., 2009). A government of Socialists, Greens and Christian Democrats was formed, leaving only the Liberals in the opposition. The coalition agreement shows a clear commitment to sustainable development, due to the Greens' strong bargaining position (as opposed to 1999) and to a generally growing awareness of environmental problems in that period, especially climate change.¹⁴ The title of the government's inaugural declaration was "A shared energy for a sustainable, humane and solidary society" (*Une énergie partagée pour une société durable, humaine et solidaire*) and it expresses the intention of promoting sustainable development into all policies (Parlement wallon, 2009). For the first time, sustainable development was explicitly assigned to a particular Minister, i.e. Vice-minister-president Jean-Marc Nollet of the Green party, which put an end to the understanding that it was a 'default' responsibility of the Environment Minister. It marks a rupture with the past view on sustainable development and reflects that the concept is taken beyond its environmental frame. However, the intention to develop a sustainable development strategy is not mentioned in the coalition agreement, although it had been a demand of the Greens in the past. The Greens rather used all their bargaining power to 'green' as much as possible the government's new transversal economic strategy. The result is the Marshall Plan 2.Green (*Plan Marshall 2.vert.*)¹⁵ It is an ambitious successor of the first Marshall Plan, supported by € 1.6 billion. The Plan is centred around 6 priority axes and guided by 2 transversal dynamics, including sustainable development.¹⁶ The Marshall Plan 2.Green contains several intentions that are framed within the pursuit of sustainable development, such as the creation of Employment-Environment Alliances (focusing mostly on the energy and construction sectors), the foreseen 'business cluster' (*pôle de compétitivité*) on environmental technologies or the so-called sustainable development projects in the other business clusters. The Plan also puts aside € 5 million to "transversally promote sustainable development through all public policies" (Wallonie, 2010, p. 48, personal translation). Several instruments are envisaged, including sustainable development indicators and an administrative sustainable development advisory unit. At the time of writing, however, most actions described in the Marshall Plan 2.Green still have to be implemented.

14 The elections were held in the run-up to the highly mediatized COP 15 of the UNFCCC at Copenhagen.

15 The Greens' main critique on the original Marshall Plan was that it remained silent on the issue of sustainable development (Accaputo et al., 2006, p. 65).

16 In a preliminary version of the Plan that was presented for consultation, sustainable development was included as a 7th priority axe.

3.3 The integration of sustainable development in transversal strategies of economic development

It is clear that the integration of sustainable development in the transversal strategies of economic development in Wallonia has known an important evolution. First, the concept of sustainable development was present in the discourse on the Future Contract, but no concrete actions followed. Second, the Marshall Plan was exclusively focused on economic measures, and made no mention at all of sustainable development. Simultaneous initiatives that were taken to integrate sustainable development into decision-making, such as the impact assessment tool, failed. Third, the recent adoption of the Marshall Plan 2.Green gives evidence of a changed way of thinking about sustainable development. The concept is taken away from its environmental interpretation and it now framed as one of the overall objectives of Walloon development. The discourse moves towards the interpretation that sustainable development needs to be integrated in all policy domains. The Marshall Plan 2.Green provides specific instruments and financial means intended for the pursuit of sustainable development. The Plan also shows some other differences with the previous strategies. It attaches large importance to evaluation mechanisms and it also wants to deal with the problem of a lacking Walloon identity.¹⁷ The main factor explaining this evolution is the presence of political will since the 2009 elections, mainly by virtue of the strong position of the Green party.

Before a thorough screening of the different factors explaining the patterns of governance for sustainable development in Wallonia, the next section looks ahead to the likely development of both tracks in the near future.

4. Outlook: the near future of sustainable development in Wallonia

Within the current political climate it can be assumed that the recent trend to integrate sustainable development into other policies (e.g. through the Marshall Plan 2.Green) will persist. The second track of governance for sustainable development, i.e. through the integration of sustainable development into transversal strategies of economic development, is more relevant than ever. It is likely to be pursued in the near future. Whether or not this track will remain relevant in a more distant future depends, of course, on the economic recovery and development of Wallonia. Recent economic indicators show that Wallonia is catching up. It will be interesting to see how that has an impact on the integration of sustainable development into plans of economic recovery.

Recent policy choices indicate that the first track, i.e. the development of a specific sustainable development plan or strategy, is likely to become more relevant as well. More precisely, it appears that the two tracks are likely to grow towards one another. A first indication is that the proposed law to issue a sustainable development strategy, deposited by the Greens in 2004, was deposited again in 2009. Moreover, the Green Vice-minister-president, responsible for sustainable development, has recently asked the Secretary-general of the Walloon administration to develop a sustainable development plan. The details of that plan are not made public yet, but it is assumed that it will have a strong link to the actions proposed for

¹⁷ The affirmation of a Walloon identity is included as an action in the Marshall Plan 2.Green (Wallonie, 2010, p. 51). In March 2010 an information campaign was launched to promote a change of name of the Region, from 'Walloon Region' (Région wallonne) to 'Wallonia' (Wallonie). The government also wants to increase the visibility of Wallonia (Gouvernement wallon, 2010).

sustainable development in the Marshall Plan 2.Green. With the development of such a plan, the two tracks would eventually coincide. Most probably, the plan would go hand in hand with the creation of a new structure within the administration responsible for the coordination of sustainable development. Such a structure would fill a gap that has long been experienced as an obstacle towards the institutionalization of sustainable development. In short, although it is too soon to give a verdict on the most recent developments, Wallonia is in the process of taking a leap towards the institutionalization of sustainable development, making use of a combination of both tracks.

5. Conclusions and explanatory factors

The analysis shows that in Wallonia it has been rather difficult to put sustainable development on the agenda and to integrate it into policy-making. In the past decades, two tracks have been followed to do so. On the one hand, since the mid-90s different actors have tried to issue a comprehensive Walloon sustainable development plan or strategy, after the example of many national and some subnational governments. On the other hand, attempts have been made to integrate sustainable development and its policy principles into other transversal policies of the Walloon governments, most notably the economic recovery plans such as the Future Contract and its successors. Both tracks have had very limited success. Only recently some results can be observed, and it is likely that important steps will be made in the near future towards the institutionalization of sustainable development in Wallonia.

Recent developments reveal that the understanding of sustainable development in Wallonia has changed. The change manifests itself both in the way sustainable development is framed as well as in its translation into policy actions. The framing of sustainable development has evolved from a purely environmental interpretation—which was established very soon after the Rio Summit—to a transversal, holistic interpretation after 2009.¹⁸ Sustainable development is now associated with issues other than environment only, the most notable expression of that new framing being the proclamation of sustainable development as one of the transversal policy goals of the Marshall Plan 2.Green. It could be assumed that sustainable development will find greater acceptance through the second track, but recent policy choices indicate that the first track is not completely abandoned. Besides a different way of framing, an evolution in the way sustainable development is translated into policy actions is noticeable too. At first, the concept was introduced in discourse only. Most initiatives that were taken in its name were nothing more than traditional environmental policy. When broader initiatives in the spirit of sustainable development were proposed, they were led by the Environment Minister and his administration, and they failed to find horizontal support within the government. A first indication of change was the designation of sustainable development as a responsibility of a Vice-minister-president in 2009. With the Marshall Plan 2.Green and possibly a future sustainable development plan, concrete actions for the pursuit of sustainable development are proposed and considerable means are invested in its institutionalization.

A study of the case of Wallonia teaches some interesting lessons for the broader field of governance for sustainable development. The usefulness of a sustainable development strategy has continuously been questioned in Wallonia. During a long time different attempts were blocked to adopt a sustainable development strategy in parallel with Wallonia's transversal

18 None of the documents define sustainable development, but the Marshall Plan 2.Green mentions that the sustainable development principles “ally the economic, social, environmental and cultural challenges in an integrated manner” (Wallonie, 2010, p. 48, personal translation).

strategy of economic recovery. Recently even the actors that pleaded for a sustainable development strategy in the past, most notably the Green party, opted for the inclusion of the concept of sustainable development into the second Marshall Plan. Other governments, in contrast, are implementing a sustainable development strategy at the same time as a transversal socio-economic strategy. In most cases, the latter has much more clout and is little integrated with the sustainable development strategy. An example is Europe 2020, the highly mediatized successor to the EU's Lisbon Strategy, which will co-exist with the practically unknown EUSDS. The Walloon approach at least appears to give a greater weight to the concept of sustainable development.

Which factors are accountable for the course of governance for sustainable development in Wallonia? First of all, socio-economic factors have been primordial. The structurally poor economic performance of Wallonia since the mid-20th century has made that Walloon governments since the creation of the Regions had to focus on economic recovery. As a consequence thereof, no political capital was invested in other major projects such as sustainable development. That was mostly apparent in the period between 1999 and 2009. Secondly, the political context has been very decisive for the importance that was attached to sustainable development. Especially during the last decade, the political will brought forward by one political actor—the Green party—has been crucial. At their first participation in the Walloon coalition in 1999, the Greens advocated the inclusion of sustainable development in the Future Contract and the development of a separate sustainable development plan, but their limited bargaining power prevented sustainable development from becoming more than a label. Between 2004 and 2009, when the Greens were cast away in the opposition, no sustainable development initiative succeeded to gain ground. After the Greens' unseen victory in 2009, sustainable development re-entered Walloon policy with pomp and circumstance through the Marshall Plan 2.Green. It thus seems that the political will of a political actor is needed to bring sustainable development on the agenda, and that the actor in question needs substantial clout to ensure that something happens beyond the discourse. Up to now, that political actor in Wallonia has been the Green party. It remains to be seen whether sustainable development will continue to be identified with the Greens and disappear when the Greens are removed from power, or whether the current institutionalization effort will be strong enough to give lasting attention to the issue.

The other explanatory factors that were withheld seem somewhat less relevant in the Walloon case. The international legitimacy pressures to develop a sustainable development strategy never had a stringent effect. Developments at the national level, in contrast, did stir up some activity in Wallonia, but that influence was not strong enough either for the WSDS project to succeed. Nevertheless, national developments can be important in the future to give new impulses to sustainable development at the Walloon level. Except for some aspects of the draft WSDS, processes of transnational communication have not been apparent. To the contrary, the strong emphasis of sustainable development in the Marshall Plan 2.Green seems without predecessor. The impact of the high degree of autonomy of Wallonia has not really been manifest in the analysis. It could be assumed, though, that the evolution of the framing of sustainable development beyond the environmental domain is influenced by the fact that Wallonia has important competences in many other areas, and that Walloon policy-makers are realizing more than before that they have a responsibility to fulfil there too.

Finally, the analysis gives evidence of the importance of some other explanatory factors. As a consequence of the little political capital invested in sustainable development before 2009, no institutional structure for sustainable development was ever created, which was felt as an

impediment. A sustainable development strategy would at least be useful in that regard. Such a strategy usually creates some kind of institutional arrangement for the coordination of sustainable development issues. Yet in Wallonia, no reference text on sustainable development has been adopted since 1995. While the WSDS project failed to create such an institutional anchor point in Wallonia, recent policy choices indicate that a new effort might be on the way. Another important factor is the question of a Walloon identity. While recently the intention to promote such an identity is observed, the absence of it has been invoked as an obstacle to the execution of an overarching 'regional project' in the past. It might be a hindrance in the case of sustainable development too.

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List of interviewees

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De Backer, Serge	1 September 2009	consultant at CAP Conseil
de Beer de Laer, Hadelin	19 August 2009	president at Federal Public Planning Service Sustainable Development; Belgian Federal Government (between 2002 and 2009)
de Kerckhove, Bruno	9 June 2009	first attaché at Environmental Coordination Department; Directorate General for Natural Resources and Environment; Ministry of the Walloon Region
Desgain, Xavier	28 April 2010	member of parliament (Écolo) at Walloon Parliament
d'Huart, Marie	1 September 2009	consultant at CAP Conseil
Petitjean, Marianne	25 March 2010	attaché at Pollution Prevention Direction; Operational Directorate-General of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment; Public Service of Wallonia
Pitance, Benoît	17 December 2008 and 15 March 2010	attaché at cabinet of Minister of Agriculture, Rural Affairs, Environment and Tourism; Walloon Government (between 2007 and 2009)
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Rouxhet, Frédéric	26 March 2010	secretary at Conseil wallon de l'Environnement pour le Développement durable
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